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ARMY'S CRITERIA FOR WOMEN OFFICERS DISCRIMINATORY: SC

The Supreme Court asked govt to grant permanent commission to women officers who were excluded on grounds of fitness standards

FITNESS STANDARDS CREATED FOR MEN

The court observed that these fitness standards were created by male officers for male officers and, hence, were discriminatory towards women. The verdict came on a batch of pleas which said the Indian Army had not granted permanent commission to even 50% of women Short Service Commission officers despite a Supreme Court order mandating the same

SUPERFICIAL EQUALITY: CHANDRACHUD

- The judgment quoted Justice R B Ginsburg of US Supreme Court, "I ask no favour for my sex. All I ask of our brethren is that they take their feet off our necks." Justice D Y Chandrachud, in his judgment said, "A superficial sense of equality is not in the true spirit of the Constitution and attempts to make equality only symbolic."

Feb 2020
WHEN THE S.C. DIRECTED ARMY TO GRANT WOMEN OFFICERS PERMANENT COMMISSION

CHENNAI • MADURAI • VIJAYAWADA • BENGALURU • KOCHI • HYDERABAD • VISAKHAPATNAM • COIMBATORE • KOZHIKODE • THIRUVANANTHAPURAM • BELAGAVI • BHUBANESWAR • SHIVAMOGGA • MANGALURU • TIRUPATI • TIRUCHY • TIRUNELVELI • SAMBALPUR • HUBBALLI • DHARMAPURI • KOTTAYAM • KANNUR • VILLUPURAM • KOLLAM • WARANGAL • TADEPALLIGUDEM • NAGAPATTINAM • THRISSUR • KALABURAGI

Govt tightens rules to control virus spread; curbs on gatherings, fines for flouting norms

Coming to B'luru? From April 1, carry Covid -ve report

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE
@ Bengaluru

FROM April 1, people entering Bengaluru from other states will need to carry an RT-PCR negative report. The Quarantine Watch app and seals on the hand to track asymptomatic Covid-19 patients isolated at home, are also back.

These measures were announced after a meeting held by Health Minister Dr K Sudhakar with BBMP Commissioner N Manjunatha Prasad, Additional Chief Secretary (Health) Jawaid Akhtar, Health Commissioner Thrilok Chandra, BBMP Special Commissioner for Health, Rajendra Cholan, BBMP Joint Commissioners and other officials.

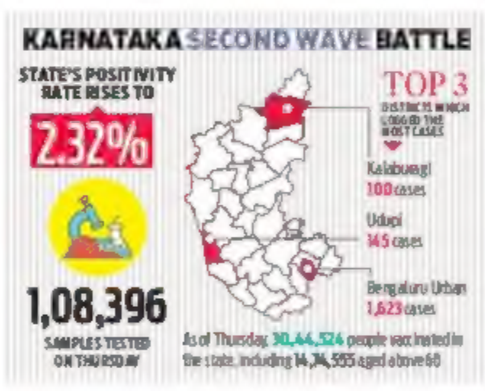
"Even if a person enters the state through another district, and then reaches Bengaluru, they will need to carry the RT-PCR report. Bengaluru's borders will not be manned to check road travellers, but apartments and residents' welfare associations must keep a check on their neighbours and inform us of any violations," Manjunatha Prasad told *TNIE*.

Sudhakar said that over 60 per cent of Covid-19 cases in the city are people with interstate travel history. "There were 1,400 cases reported in Bengaluru, which is the highest in the last four months. There is a spike in cases every day. Mutant viruses have been reported in India and 700 cases have been found so far. As per experts, it spreads faster than the original one," Sudhakar said.

To scale up testing, tracing and tracking, at least 20 primary and secondary contacts will be traced within 24 hours of a person testing positive, the minister added, while noting that apartments are becoming Covid-19 clusters.

Among other measures, marshals will be deployed in crowded places such as markets, bus and railway stations, theatres, marriage halls, schools, colleges and religious places, to check for violations of Covid-19 norms. P3

BBMP marshals stop passengers for not wearing masks and penalise them, at Mysuru Road Satellite Bus Station in Bengaluru on Thursday | VINOD KUMAR T



4L COVID VACCINE DOSES REACH STATE, 12L MORE TO ARRIVE BY NEXT WEEK

A consignment of four lakh doses of Covishield arrived in the state by a special flight late on Wednesday, with another 12 lakh doses expected to reach by next week. "State has ensured that there is no shortage of the vaccines," Health Minister Dr K Sudhakar tweeted. He advised all those eligible to register and book appointments for vaccination on www.selfregistration.cowin.gov.in or the Arogya Setu app, besides also availing on-the-spot registration facility at vaccination centres. He requested people to follow all precautions, and avoid functions and public gatherings.

CJI suggests ad-hoc judges to reduce pendency of cases

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE
@ New Delhi

THE Supreme Court on Thursday said ad-hoc judges can be appointed in high courts to clear pending cases.

"There are suits pending for 30 years, which also include criminal trials. It is not a matter of opinion but fact that judges who have been there for 15 to 20 years can continue to dispose of matters," said a bench headed by Chief Justice of India S A Bobde.

The bench was hearing PIL filed by NGO Lok Prahari seeking appointment of retired judges to clear pending cases.

The bench said the Constitution allows appointment of ad-hoc judges and taking that route has become a necessity in view of the out-of-hand pendency.

S A Bobde, Chief Justice of India

The Centre's counsel, Additional Solicitor General R S Suri, said that ad-hoc appointments can be made after vacancies for regular posts are filled. To this, CJI Bobde said, "We are not sure how much cooperation we are receiving from you regarding that. But ad-hoc judges are not a threat."

The ad-hoc judges would be considered the junior-most so that they don't become a 'threat' to anybody in terms of seniority, the CJI added.

The SC also clarified that it's not creating a new convention, but is only suggesting to use a provision in the Constitution. "Article 224A is a Constitutional provision... We will lay down guidelines stating that if pendency goes beyond a certain limit for, say, more than eight or 10 years, then the Chief Justice will automatically recommend the appointment of ad-hoc judge. After the Collegium approves, they can sit and it (term) can be extended," it added.

The court also wanted to know the status of the 55 names cleared by the SC Collegium for appointments to various high courts, but have not been notified by the government yet.

The top court noted that there should be a reasonable timeframe for the Law Ministry to respond to the Collegium's recommendations.

After seeking suggestions from the Centre and high courts, the SC adjourned the matter to April 8.

Highest global Covid contact rate in India

RICHA SHARMA @ New Delhi

AMID the galloping Covid-19 cases, it turns out that India is witnessing the world's highest coronavirus contact rate, whereby an infected person is infecting another one every two days. What is worrying is the massive jump in contact rate this month, according to the Indian Supermodel for Covid-19.

The latest analysis through the model, initiated by the Department of Science of Technology, predicts the peak of the second wave by mid-April, when daily infections will be between 70,000 and 80,000, primarily driven by Maharashtra.

According to scientists analysing the model, the cause of this unexpected jump in contact rate is likely to be a combination of more crowding in public spaces like schools and colleges, markets, public transport and faster spreading mutations.

"The contact parameter seen in India is reported nowhere in the world and a massive jump in contact rate is causing the sharp rise in cases all over. Early March, it was around 0.24 (an infected person infecting another in four days) and today it stands at 0.48 (every second day). The spike in many states is primarily due to a significant increase in contact rate," said Manindra Agrawal, Deputy Director at IIT, Kanpur, who is part of the supermodel study.

Agrawal expects the second wave peak around April 15-25. "In Maharashtra, the contact rate has been high for a while (0.38 now though it was around 0.45 when there was no lockdown). The peak will be bigger than during the first wave," said Agarwal. In Delhi, Gujarat, Kerala, Karnataka and TN, the contact rate is around 0.5, while in Punjab it is 0.3. P9

Double whammy

The reach parameter measures the fraction of the population affected by the pandemic. At 40%, reach is the highest in Maharashtra, making it a double whammy along with high contact rate

Fear, loathing and a new minority politics

SITTING inside his dirt-coated, poorly-stocked provision store next to a rural road at Joypur village in Assam's Kokrajhar district, Akbar Ahmed is reticent about the ongoing state elections.

"I am so busy in my shop that I have had no time to think of it. Let voting day come then I will apply my mind," he said as cacophonic traffic blowing gas horns raced past, kicking up plumes of cough-inducing dust. A little later, he dropped guard a tad, saying in the 2016 Assembly elections, he had voted for the Bodoland People's Front, then an alliance partner of the Bharatiya Janata Party.

Ali-ur-Zaman in Kaziranga is similarly circumspect. Originally from Bongaigaon district in eastern Assam, he and his wife have been running a *dhaba* for the past four years on the national highway that cuts through the rhino sanctuary. "I will see, I can't say anything about voting right now," he answered in one-liners, suspicious of every question and refusing to even make eye contact. His wife hemmed and hawed in greater measure: "We are confused."

About 350 kms away inside a weather-beaten, tin-roofed tea stall in Bagbari village, Dhubri district, Noor Islam is watching a video on his mobile of the arrest of civil rights activist-turned-candidate Akhil Gogoi. Unlike Akbar and Zaman, Islam is not fearful of discussing the elections with a stranger. He declares his support for the Raijor Dal, Gogoi's new political party, and spews venom on the BJP and its local candidate, Ashok Kumar Singhi.

Ear to the Ground
ASSAM POLLS

H KHOGEN SINGH
@ Kokrajhar/Dhubri

The tea shop owner, Usman Moni, in between blowing out betel nut from his paan-stained mouth and teeth every 15 minutes, is also vocal about the polls, the BJP and Singhi, describing the saffron party's nominee as "Hitlerian".

It's not difficult to understand why the Muslims of Kokrajhar and Kaziranga were suspicious, while those in Dhubri were open, expansive and even polemical.

CONTINUED ON: P9

HC quashes FIR against Kangana over tweet

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE
@ Bengaluru

THE Karnataka High Court on Thursday quashed a trial court order directing the Kythasandra police in Tumakuru district to register an FIR against Bollywood actor Kangana Ranaut over her tweet on the farmers' protest. The trial court had passed the order based on a private complaint against her.

The High Court noted that the magistrate did not satisfy himself as to whether the averments in the complaint constitute offences alleged against the actor, and said the order was passed mechanically. In view of this, it should be looked at afresh by the trial court and orders passed in accordance with law, the court ordered.

The HC was dealing with a petition filed by Kangana, questioning the validity of the trial court's order on the private complaint filed by Tumakuru-based advocate L Ramesh Naik on September 25, 2020. P5

BIGGER, BETTER & VIRTUAL THINKEDU

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE
@ Chennai

IT was this time last year that our world changed forever. Prime Minister Narendra Modi had announced a nationwide lockdown and we were all confined to our homes, grappling with a new reality. But amid such uncertainties, there's one thing you could always rely on to happen like clockwork — the TNIE's ThinkEdu Conclave.

Over the past eight years, *The New Indian Express* has brought you a niche, curated and thought-provoking event in Chennai with some of the biggest names in the Indian education space and beyond in the form of the ThinkEdu Conclave. This year, with the pandemic refusing to recede, we've taken ThinkEdu virtual. We will bring 35 speakers streaming directly to your homes with some of the most vital and stimulating conversations around education, jobs, life after a pandemic, the new National Education Policy and so much more that centres around this year's theme - Lessons for a new world.

This year, we have Union ministers Ramesh Pokhriyal and Nitin Gadkari, Infosys Co-founder Kris Gopalakrishnan, Education Secretary Amit Khare, intellectuals like Makarand Paranjape, AICTE Chairman Anil Sahasrabudhe, CSIR's DG Dr Shekhar C Mande, among others talking about how the country can be truly *Atmanirbhar*. We also have authors like Amish, Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni and Anuja Chauhan discussing their books and offering lessons for our young.

ThinkEdu kicks off on March 26 at 7 pm. And this year, instead of two days, we have extended the event to five days — till March 30. You can catch the sessions live at newindianexpress.com, edexlive.com, eventxpress.com and our social media channels — Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn and YouTube.

EXPRESS READ

2 CRPF personnel killed in JK militant attack

Srinagar: Two CRPF personnel were killed and two jawans injured in a militant attack in Lawaypora on the outskirts of Srinagar on Thursday. The deceased are identified as SI Manga Ram Dev Barman and constable Ashok Kumar. P10

Sri Lanka Navy arrests 54 Indian fishermen

COLOMBO: The Sri Lanka Navy has arrested at least 54 Indian fishermen and seized five trawlers for allegedly poaching in its territorial waters, an official statement said here on Thursday.

Petrol, diesel prices cut for second straight day

NEW DELHI: Petrol and diesel prices were on Thursday cut for the second straight day, as international oil prices cooled on prospects of a speedy recovery in consumption getting clouded by a second wave of Covid cases. While petrol price was cut by 21 paise per litre, diesel price fell by 20 paise, according to state-owned fuel retailers.

WITH THIS ISSUE
CITY'S BEST WEEKEND GUIDE
INDULGE
30 PAGES, INCLUDING 16 OF INDULGE (TABLOID)

LS BYPOLL
MANGALA ANGADI, SATISH JARKIHOLI IN BELAGAVI RACE

The BJP is fielding Mangala, wife of late Belagavi MP Suresh Angadi, for the upcoming Belagavi Lok Sabha bypoll, while the Congress has named Satish Jarkiholi as its candidate. The bypoll is scheduled to be held on April 17, with counting on May 2 | P4

MISSING ORNAMENT CASE

Civic worker finds God's gold in dust at MM Hills

K SHIVA KUMAR @ Mysuru

A missing gold ornament of the presiding deity at Male Mahadeshwara Hills in Chamarajanagar district had the temple administration, the priests and the police in a tizzy. But as luck would have it, a civic worker found it amidst garbage late on Thursday afternoon and promptly alerted the temple authorities, much to their relief.

Much drama preceded the discovery of the 30-gram gold ornament in the garbage pile. The Karadige (a box-like ornament in which a Shiva Linga is placed) of Lord Mahadeshwara was found to be missing after the idol was taken in a procession out of the temple on March 18. A frantic search by the priests, the temple authorities and devotees yielded nothing.

The temple administration then served a show-cause notice to the three priests who were posted on rotation in March, as they had signed a document and taken custody of the ornament which adorns the idol.

A complaint was also lodged at the M M Hills police station on March 23, suspecting that it may have been stolen or had gone missing.

The Karadige of Lord Mahadeshwara which was found by a civic worker in a garbage pile | EXPRESS

When the priests could not find the ornament after days of search, they even agreed to pay from their pockets and get a new Karadige made with the permission of the temple authorities.

The incident had also come in for severe criticism from the locals and devotees.

Around 3.45 pm on Thursday, Sunil Kumar, a contract pourakarmika found the Karadige when he was loading garbage on to a vehicle. He quickly alerted the temple officers who rushed there along with the police and found the ornament in the pile of garbage.

Male Mahadeshwara Hills Development Authority CEO Jayavibhava Swamy, Police Inspector G S Ramesh and Deputy Secretary Basavaraj visited the spot. The M M police said they will hand over the Karadige to the temple authorities after completing legal formalities.

Sunil's prompt action not only helped resolve the case, but also saved the three priests from further trouble. The police and temple officers have appreciated Sunil's honesty which helped resolve the issue.